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ABSTRACT

There are two broad views about what determines language teacher effectiveness. One focuses on teachers' language and methodological knowledge/skills. The other concentrates on personality (intelligence, self-awareness, and rapport). This paper presents a framework that reconciles the two views, proposes a way to visualize their interrelations, and takes into account research findings that indicate that teachers' practices are mostly influenced by their interpretation of methodological frameworks. The framework includes three elements: personality, methodology, and language. Teacher effectiveness is depicted as the area of a triangle, with each side representing the extent to which each element is developed. The larger the area, the higher the effectiveness. Three categories include the following: all elements are equally developed, one element is far less developed than the others, and one element is far more developed than the others. Given the perimeter of a triangle, an equilateral triangle will have the largest area from any other triangle with the same perimeter. This points to the benefits of a balanced development of all three areas. (Contains 14 references.) (SM)

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The Shape of the Language Teacher

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The Shape of the Language Teacher*

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Introduction

There are two broad views on what determines the effectiveness of a language teacher. One focuses on teachers' language and methodological knowledge/skills (e.g. Rivers, 1972; Shulman, 1994; Woods, 1996). The other concentrates on personality, for example teachers' intelligence, self-awareness, and rapport (e.g. Bridges, 1993; Prodromou, 1998; Ur, 1997).

Here I present a framework which:

- Reconciles the two views, giving equal weight to all elements: language knowledge/skills, methodological knowledge/skills and personality.
- Proposes a way to visualise their interrelations.
- Takes into account research findings which indicate that teachers' practices are mostly influenced by their *interpretation* of methodological frameworks (e.g. Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Roberts, 1998; Ulichny, 1996; Woods, 1996).

Elements

Julian Edge (2002) proposed the term "person-who-teaches" to stress the personality factor. I have expanded the term into *person-who-teaches-language*. Each word points towards an indispensable element in a language teacher's profile (*Fig. 1*).

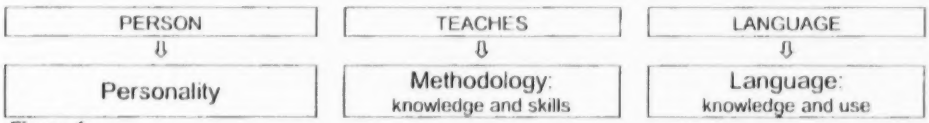

Figure 1

In the following tables I outline the key aspects of each element (adapted from Gabrielatos, 1999, 2000, 2001).

Personality

• Self-awareness. • Interpersonal skills. • Ability to observe, think critically and use experience. • Sensitivity to context.	• Attitude towards change, development, diversity, quality, co-operation and authority. • Perception of learning, teacher/learner roles and professional development.

Methodology

Knowledge	*Skills*
• Views on methodology. • Available materials. • Own views on learning and teaching.	• Seeing implications of theory. • Planning and teaching. • Balancing support and challenge. • Action research.

* This is a summary of my paper given at the 36th International Annual IATEFL Conference, University of York, 25 March 2002. It was published in Pulverness, A. (ed.) 2002. *IATEFL 2002: York Conference Selections*. IATEFL (pp. 75-78). Here I have added the references and bibliography, which were omitted from the IATEFL version.

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Language

Knowledge	*Skills*
• Different views/theories on language. • Awareness of own views on language.	• Own language use. • Ability to see the implications of language analysis and draw conclusions from own contact with language. • Sensitivity to learners' language level.

Unavoidably, there is some overlap among the elements. For example, teachers' perception and knowledge of language will influence they way they teach (Woods, 1996: 187); teachers' general level of self-awareness will affect their awareness of their beliefs about language and learning, which, in turn, will influence the content and mode of their teaching.

Interrelations

In this framework, the effectiveness of a teacher is depicted as the area of a triangle, with each side representing the extent to which an element is developed (Gabrielatos, 1999, 2000, 2001). The larger the area, the higher the effectiveness (*Fig. 2*).

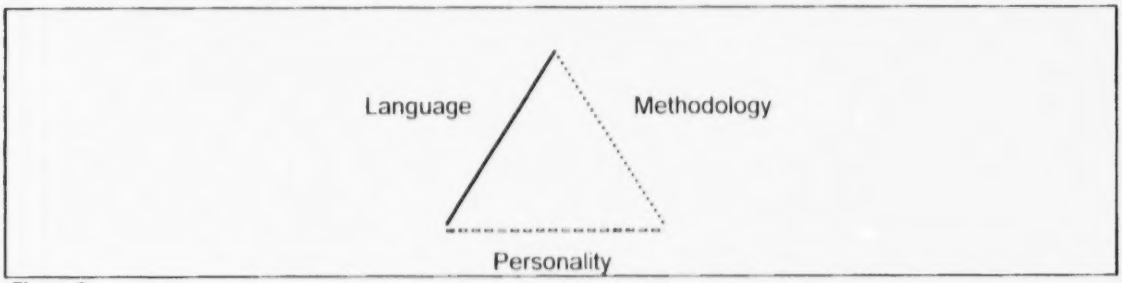

Figure 2

Apart from comparing the size of different triangles, it is also helpful to compare the *sides* of individual triangles, that is, examine the *relative degree of development* of each element. In that respect, we can identify three categories.

1. **All elements are *equally* developed**. In this case, all elements are utilised to their full capacity and combined for the maximum possible effect (*Fig. 2*).

2. **One element is far *less* developed than the others**. Here, the less developed element will limit the effect of the others. This representation can also help explain why teachers using different methodologies show comparable success in learning outcomes (e.g. Clarke, 1999). Combinations of different levels of development can produce *equal* triangles (*Fig. 3*).

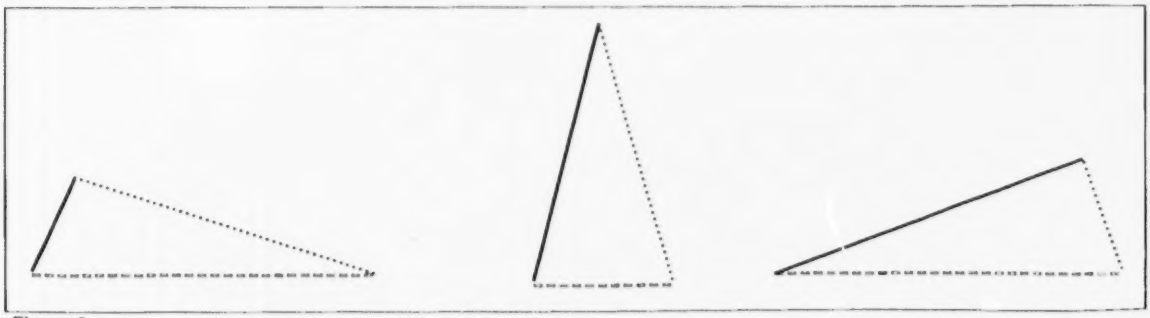

Figure 3

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3. **One element is far *more* developed than the others**. Here, the more developed element cannot be fully utilised (*Fig. 4*).

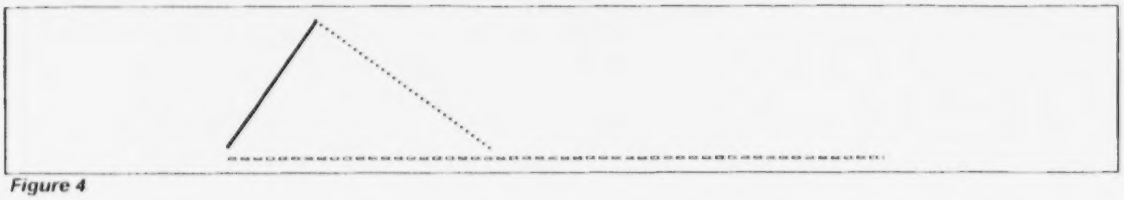

Figure 4

Some observations

Given the perimeter of a triangle (i.e. the sum of its sides), an *equilateral* triangle will have the largest area from any other triangle with the same perimeter. This points towards the benefits of a *balanced development* of all three elements.

It is essential that all three elements are well developed, or at the very least, developed above a 'threshold of acceptability'. True, any cut-off points are arbitrary, but such thresholds are already used in education and in determining entrance to professions.

Limited or faulty language knowledge will communicate an inaccurate picture of the target language. Inappropriate methodology will make learning too time-consuming and may discourage learners. An uninterested or offensive teacher will offer very little support and few opportunities for learning, and may de-motivate learners.

Reservations

The triangle framework is only a crude representation of the multitude of complex interrelations that make up the profile of a language teacher. It is proposed only as a point of departure, a helpful way to visualise the interaction of the basic elements contributing to a language teacher's effectiveness.

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